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SUBJECT: POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE IN KALONZO COUNTRY

REF: A. NAIROBI 1069
[1](#)B. NAIROBI 220

Classified By: Political Counselor Larry Andre for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Officials and local leaders in Machakos, a medium-sized Kenyan city, are no less engaged in the current general elections debate than their counterparts in the capital, but have a cooler view of what the next 10 months hold. Overwhelmingly populated by members of the Kamba tribe, Machakos is squarely in the opposition camp - as long as their "son" Kalonzo Musyoka is the presidential candidate. Opposition politics notwithstanding, Machakos officials are generally skeptical about the central government, and its long arm into their backyard. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On the dividing line between the old and new Nairobi-Mombasa highways, Machakos is close enough to Nairobi to understand well the politics of the capital, but far enough away to have a mind of its own. A small city of about 60,000 residents, Machakos Town is the seat of Machakos District. The district, currently divided into six constituencies, is slated to be sliced into three districts when the planned increase in the number of districts is effected.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The district is governed by a mix of locally elected and centrally appointed officials. The parallel systems of local government and provincial administration are the result of independent Kenya's attempt to patch a democratic system on a colonial relic which was allowed to remain in place. As such, it has been one of the targets of the constitutional reform debate and is inherently conflicted. The provincial administration, run by the Ministry of Internal Security and Provincial Administration is a centrally appointed network of civil servants (provincial commissioners, district commissioners, chiefs). Local government comprises a system of counties, one for each district, with locally elected district councilors, and in the case of larger population centers, municipal councilors and a mayor. Machakos District, for example, is also Masaku County. The operation of the local government is overseen by the Ministry of Local Government. Both Ministries are headed by ministers who are also elected members of parliament (with their own political interests).

Tribalism Alive and Well

14. (C) An overwhelmingly Kamba area, Machakos is Kalonzo country. Machakos residents are pulling for their Kamba "son", opposition presidential candidate (and by many counts the only candidate out there who could beat Kibaki) Kalonzo Musyoka as the next president. What is less clear, however, is whether they are rooting for the opposition coalition ODM-K party or Musyoka himself. "It's all about tribe," District Commissioner (DC) S. O. Warfa told poloff. An outsider to the local Kamba community, Warfa, who is from the country's northeastern region, reiterated that politics in Kenya is not about issues or developed agendas but personalities and tribe. In Machakos, he continued, anyone vying for elected office only has to successfully attach him or herself to Musyoka to win. The consequence, Warfa added, is that the major personalities in a tribe become godfathers, granting the electoral wishes of their chosen ones.

15. (C) While Kalonzo is clearly the favorite in Machakos, he has yet to win the ODM-K nomination, and if he does, the opposition coalition has to stay together, backing him all the way to State House. "If Musyoka is not the ODM candidate, Machakos will go to plan B," Kenya Police Officer in Charge of Station (OCS) for Machakos Municipality Oduor stated. Oduor declined to suggest what plan B might be, but members of the Masaku County Council, the district's elected body, were less circumspect: "Kibaki will win again," they claimed, suggesting Kalonzo's supporters would vote for the President. (NOTE: There are two reasons for Kibaki as the second choice of Kamba voters. Irrespective of tribe, Kibaki himself is generally popular among Kenyans, who distinguish the President from his government (ref A). Also, there is a tribal affinity and a close historical and cultural relationship between these two Bantu groups. END NOTE.) But Optimistic for Peace

16. (C) Although Nairobi-based observers predict the possibility of a return to elevated levels of political violence this elections cycle (ref A), there is less concern in Machakos. The Kamba are a calm people, OCS Oduor explained, noting that apart from some other communities which had migrated to Machakos town, the entire district was homogenous. Nonetheless, he will be allocated some additional police, and he will identify hotspots, as the elections season progresses, repositioning his security forces as necessary. DC Warfa too, was unconcerned by predictions of political violence. Pointing to a copy of the day's newspaper, the DC accused the media of incitement. Peaceful does not necessarily mean trouble free, however. District Elections Coordinator for the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) Ndonge told poloff that while rigging on election day was a thing of the past, he expected politicians to attempt to "transfer" voters. Seen in Kenya during past elections, transferring voters is a process by which a parliamentary candidate will bus in favorable voters from a neighboring constituency for registration, and again on polling day, to sway the vote where he is contesting.

17. (C) Despite his confidence that Kambas in Machakos would conduct themselves peacefully during the elections season, OCS Oduor pointed out that ethnic sensitivities will run close to the surface. He offered as an example his own position. Although apolitical, the OCS is responsible for granting licenses for politicians and parties to conduct rallies. Sackings and transfers are not uncommon if an officer is perceived to be insufficiently supportive of his boss' political preferences.

The Divide Between Local and Central -----

18. (C) The elections debate highlights institutional tensions between the provincial administration and local government. Although the County Council is locally elected, the Council's clerk is appointed by the Ministry of Local Government. The clerk controls access to Ministry funds and is effectively the Ministry's eyes and ears in the district. Machakos County Councilors expressed frustration at this

arrangement, which in effect, they told poloff, gives the Ministry control over the Council. Furthermore, Council Chairman Samuel Muindu added, during an election year, the clerk will attempt to ensure few councilors are reelected (he did not, however, explain how this is done). Muindu argued that the clerk prefers less experienced councilors who are unfamiliar with the process of working with the Ministry.

¶9. (C) Adding yet another layer, Machakos Town is a designated municipality, with ten elected municipal councilors, headed by a Mayor. Machakos Deputy Mayor Mutavi echoed the County Council's suspicions about the government in Nairobi, decrying as "mischief" Internal Security Minister Michuki's widely reported efforts to encourage local chiefs to influence the election. Mutavi told poloff that Machakos chiefs reported to him that they had received instructions from Michuki to only allow public rallies to be held by candidates favorable to the government. As the lowest level of the provincial administration system, there are 62 in Machakos District, Chiefs are highly influential and intimately involved in the political life of their administrative areas. The ECK's Ndonye remarked that the success of the current voter registration drive (most likely final before the election) depended on Chiefs and Assistant Chiefs to actively promote participation.

Comment

¶10. (C) The view from Machakos is mixed: predictions for a peaceful electoral season are positive; firmly entrenched tribal interests with little regard for political agendas is disappointing. There is no question about the strength of personality driven politics. With local officials who are all king of their own patch, there is plenty of room for "mischief" as there was during July 2006's by-elections. While none of it was violent, it was insidious, underscoring the importance of a consistent message delivered to government officials and politicians on all sides to observe the highest standards of electoral conduct. Powerful old dogs like Michuki, however, have proven themselves unable and unwilling to learn new tricks. As a district commissioner in the colonial government, Michuki saw that the provincial administration is a tool to be exploited by the central government. It is a lesson he has not forgotten. END COMMENT.
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